

STATUS OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA'S YEAR 2000 CONVERSION COMPLIANCE

HEARING BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA OF THE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ONE HUNDRED SIXTH CONGRESS

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FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 1999

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA,
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:30 a.m., in room 2154, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Thomas M. Davis (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Representatives Davis and Norton.

Staff present: Peter Sirh, staff director; Howard Denis, counsel; Bob Dix and Anne Mack, professional staff members; Ellen Brown, clerk; Trey Hardin, communications director; Jon Bouker, minority counsel; and Ellen Rayner, minority chief clerk.

Mr. DAVIS. Good morning. I apologize for being here a couple minutes late.

The year 2000 conversion has begun to appear on the radar screen of policymakers as a very high-priority concern. This is an enormous challenge for the District of Columbia, along with the rest of the Nation and the world. I am going to be introducing bipartisan legislation very shortly that will address some of the key issues that affect the country as a whole, but our hearing today will address matter of particular concern to the Nation's capital.

My thanks to the ranking member of this subcommittee Eleanor Holmes Norton for her continuing leadership on these issues in the District of Columbia. I also want to thank Congresswoman Connie Morella, vice chair of this subcommittee, and another distinguished member of the subcommittee Steve Horn, who are national leaders on the year 2000 compliance matters.

The year 2000 compliance is at heart a unique management issue for both the public and the private sectors. The necessity to address this matter has been as obvious as the calendar itself. Apparently it was believed that affected systems and devices would be replaced with new technology in advance of the inexorable deadline of December 31, 1999. This is a classic case of too many people assuming that somebody else would solve the problem.

Simply put, many computers and other electronic devices which contain embedded chips are programmed to use only two digits to represent the calendar year. As a result, many computer systems will not be able to distinguish between the year 2000 and the year 1900. Moreover, microprocessors also have been reprogrammed with the same two-digit year and are therefore subject to the same failure potential.

Our attention is drawn in a special way to the challenges which confront the District. The regional compacts which exist among various governmental entities require us to examine these matters in a comprehensive manner. The Water and Sewer Authority and WMATA are only two of the entities with regional cooperative agreements. Many Health and Human Service functions are also involved. Clearly, transportation and public safety concerns are critical.

On October 2, 1998, this subcommittee conducted a joint oversight hearing on the District's year 2000 compliance effort. Among other things, we learned that local compliance efforts could not begin in a meaningful way until June of last year. That fact in and of itself alerted us to the emergency which still confronts the District. It was clear that the city would have to proceed simultaneously with remediation and testing.

Citizens should be aware that this could have an impact on the ability of the District to provide uninterrupted services, as well as hinder Federal workers in their regular commute.

The subcommittee is working closely with the District's Chief Technology Officer and others to help the city address these challenges. Working together, much progress has been made, but much remains to be done. The District remains in a crisis mode, and the need to remove obstacles must continue to be relentless.

On January 28, 1999, the District's inspector general, E. Barrett Prettyman, Jr., issued a management alert letter on the District's year 2000 readiness status. The letter reassures us that milestone dates related to the Metropolitan Police Department, employment service and Chief Financial Officer have been met, but many issues still remain.

I look forward to hearing from our distinguished panel, and I would now yield to Delegate Norton, the ranking member of the subcommittee, for an opening statement.

[The prepared statement of Hon. Thomas M. Davis follows:]

